

Ahmadinejad views life with loser's eyes

By REDA MANSOUR

On the very day that Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke at Columbia University, I happened to be reading poetry to 30 Holocaust survivors in Atlanta. Throughout the presentation, I felt uneasy; I felt as if I should be exposing the radical leader who not only denies the Holocaust, but calls for a new genocide in "wiping Israel off the map."

But in actuality, the situation in Iran has already exposed him as a cruel and ineffective leader. The Iranians are tired of his empty promises "in the name of God," although only a miracle could now save the failed Islamic Revolution.

More than 20 percent of the nation is unemployed; the educated are leaving the country, resulting in a substantial brain drain; and despite its massive oil reserves, Iran is heavily dependent on imported fuel. It continues to scrape by because of the current high crude oil prices, but Ahmadinejad knows that this is only a weak patch for a bleeding economy.

Desperate

The Iranian president is desperate and has every reason to be: His beloved Islamic Revolution is almost 30 years old, but it has failed the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad is selling the nuclear illusion to his citizens to distract them from his and Ayatollah Khomeini's monumental failure.

Scoffing at the 9/11 tragedy and denying the Holocaust are both dangerous and shocking behavior from a potential nuclear power, but these declarations say something even more disturbing about Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad sees the world through the eyes of a street fighter, continuously spewing threats from the losing side of his global gang fight in the attempt to save face. After all, Ahmadinejad was among the mob that stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, a protected symbol of dialogue between nations — the dialogue he was allegedly seeking at Columbia during his recent visit.

This brutal mentality makes a nuclear Iran even more dangerous. We have no assurance Ahmadinejad would not pass the bomb to one of his many proxy terrorist groups in Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza to be detonated in London, Paris, New York or Tel Aviv. In fact, I believe he would, for dictators never know when to stop, and in their desperation, they don't hesitate to take others down with them.

Despite the looming nuclear threat, I found a bit of poetic justice by the end of my poetry reading. Reading Hebrew poetry to a group of Holocaust survivors could possibly be the greatest act of defiance against the world's most visible dictator. It was as if we were saying "we are still here, and we will be reading our poetry long after the champions of hate like you are gone."



Today, Holocaust survivors and their descendants are flourishing in Israel. The sons and daughters of such Holocaust survivors are busy making the world's smallest satellites, camera pills and countless computer and telecom innovations.

Israel was built by Holocaust survivors who chose life over revenge and innovation over destruction; the people of Israel know that the struggle is really between the forces of human progress and the false prophets of destruction.

Also in the United States, the positive impact of Holocaust survivors is still felt. Many of them are the scientists, engineers and doctors responsible for some of the greatest milestones of this nation.

Ordinary people

Many others were just ordinary people who chose the extraordinary path of forgetting the dark world they left behind in exchange for the hope of a happy life. And so there we were, nearly 30 Holocaust survivors and an Israeli diplomat gathered together during the same moments Ahmadinejad was preaching hate and violence. Thirty survivors — one for each year of the failed Iranian revolution — all with shared hope Ahmadinejad will continue to fail in bringing upon us his nuclear nightmare.

Ambassador Reda Mansour, a Druse Israeli, is Israel's consul general for the Southeast, based in Atlanta. He is an expert on Middle East intellectual history and is a poet and a longtime activist on behalf of Arab-Jewish dialogue in Israel.

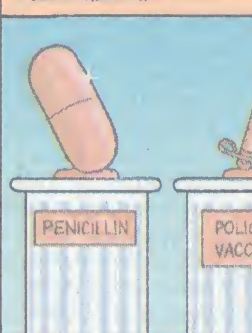
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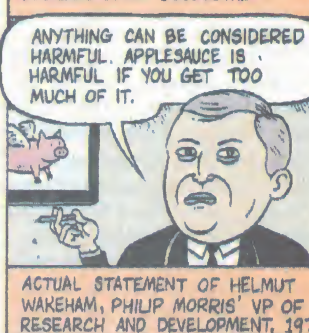
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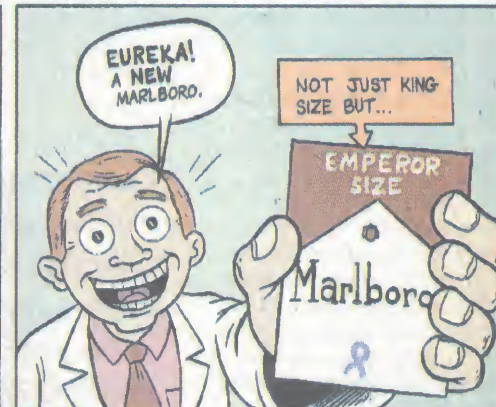
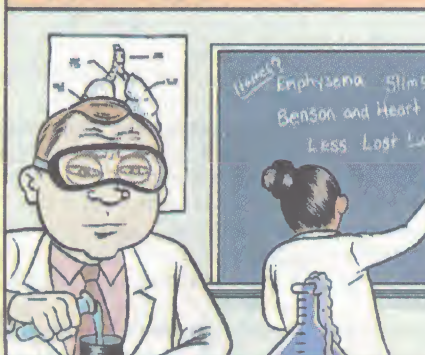


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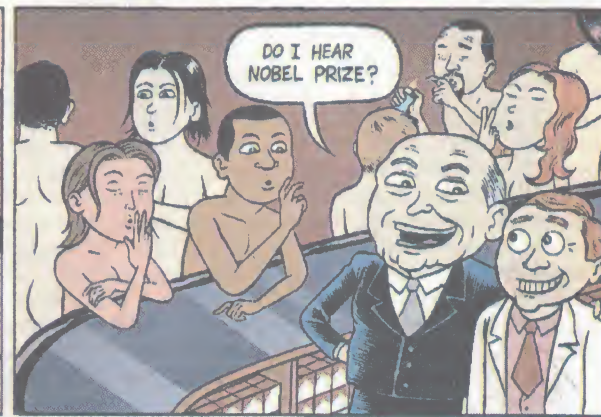


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SPECIAL

The Associated Press reported last week that the nation's largest cigarette maker, Philip Morris, is staking its future on a research center to develop "new and reduced-risk tobacco products." The company is counting on the public's short memory to communicate the perception that cigarettes can be made safer. For more than half a century, the tobacco industry has disputed almost every report on the dangers of smoking, has claimed that more research was needed and has promised to remove any disease-causing component found in cigarette smoke. Yet, more than 4,000 poisons have been identified in cigarette smoke, including more than 40 cancer-causers. If consumers are to be told that one, two or even 22 of these chemicals have been reduced or removed, then they will assume the problem has been solved and will continue to light up. Dr. Alan Blum, director of the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, likens the quest for a safe cigarette to alchemy. But even though he and cartoonist Matt Bors don't believe Philip Morris is any more likely to create a safe cigarette than to turn lead into gold, they wonder if continuing to fool the public may be worth its weight in gold. E-mail: ablum@cchs.ua.edu.

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